

A Social Progress Reprint

Start Where You Are

*A Primer on Social Action
in the Local Church*

SOCIAL ACTION— HOW TO GET STARTED

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March 1958

From This Vantage Point

THE content of this issue of SOCIAL PROGRESS could come under the heading of letters that never were written, or correspondence that never happened.

Actually, we have encountered all the questions raised by Mr. Layman about the program of social education and action in the local church—not once but many times and in all parts of the country. Sometimes our replies have not been as complete or confident as we have tried to make them here.

We are really more sure of ourselves and of what we say when we talk about the *why* of social action in the local church than when we attempt to tell *how* it should be done. That is where the shoe pinches.

The truth is that we are learning all the time—that we know more now about *church* social action than we knew two years ago, and in another two years we will know a great deal more about it; that there is no single perfect plan, but as many gimmicks and strategies for effective social action as there are issues and kinds of churches to deal with them; and that the important factor is not *how* but *who*, not a plan of action but a dedicated Christian person who is worried about man's inhumanity to man and who wants to respond in faithfulness and truth to God's action in the world.

Then the method becomes important. After the person the plan. For there are more wrong ways to go about the business of implementing Christian concern in the church than right ways.

In the letters that follow, the important thing, after all, is not the fine advice so easily offered by the Philadelphia sages, but the minister of the church in Anytown who leads his leaders to a new awareness of need and responsibility, the elders of the church who take time to learn "what it is all about," and especially a certain layman who is not afraid to ask "leading questions."

—*The SEA Staff*

I

What It's All About

Purpose

**Department of Social Education and Action
Witherspoon Building
Philadelphia 7, Pennsylvania**

Dear Department:

I am an elder in the Presbyterian Church in Anytown. The session has appointed me chairman for social education and action.

We intend to set up a committee. But before we do, we want to know what it is all about. The minister suggested that I write to you.

Please explain social education and action. What is its purpose?

The session asked me to report at its next meeting.

Yours,

A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

We have your good letter of last week. We are glad to know that you have been made chairman for social education and action in the Anytown Church, and that you plan to set up a committee to work with you. You apparently mean business.

As to your inquiry about the meaning and purpose of social education and action, in the compass of a single letter we can do little more than give you a sketch of "what it is all about."

Let us make three suggestions.

First, it is important to under-

stand that "social education and action" is not a new notion in the church. It is a long name for an old idea—that the church should be interested in (or, better, concerned about and active in) public affairs, in terms of what they do to people, and should seek to do something about them. By public affairs, of course, we mean questions and issues in various aspects of our common life—political, economic, inter-racial, international.

Some members of your session may think that it is unusual for a church to be worried about social problems to the extent of appointing

a chairman and erecting a committee. You should help them to see that the churches of America have always been interested, and sometimes deeply involved, in the public issues of their times (freedom, slavery, sobriety, good government, civil rights, popular education, social justice, equality of opportunity, peace); that Presbyterian churches have a notable record of social concern; that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, year after year, makes thoughtful deliverances on current public issues and calls upon the churches for appropriate action; that for fifty years or more our denomination has maintained a central department to deal with social questions and to help implement General Assembly deliverances; that again and again, especially since 1935, the General Assembly has encouraged local churches to set up committees on social education and action and to include this emphasis in their ongoing programs.

Note also that the United Presbyterian Church of North America, our sister denomination with which we are uniting this year, has a good heritage in social education and action. Article 38 of the Confessional Statement, approved by the UP General Assembly in 1925, is one of the finest declarations of Christian social concern on record. It has clear implications for the work of the local churches.

Secondly, it is important for us to understand that we engage in social education and action as Christians, or, rather, as a Christian community. We are talking about our Christian responsibility

in social relations.

When we teach a course on public affairs in a summer leadership school, we usually devote the first half of the course to an attempt to reach a common understanding of what we have been calling "the theological ground on which we stand." We discuss such Christian ideas as "the sovereignty of God" and "election" and the light they shed on the meaning of Christian obedience in dealing with public questions. We talk about the nature of the church, the nature of society, and the implications of standing with one foot in each community (for that is our common predicament—yours and ours).

We believe that a local committee, such as you plan to set up, should have a sound orientation in the Christian approach to social action. This should have high priority in the agenda of the first several meetings of the group. Session members and other church leaders may well be included in this phase of your work. Indeed, you should keep constantly before the church the idea that in social education and action we are trying to do what God's word requires, as Christians and as a Christian community, with regard to the social issues of the day.

Our third and last (for now) suggestion is that you and your committee, when you have one, will be concerned with both social education and social action. This should be obvious in our use of the phrase "social education and action" to designate this aspect of the church's work. In "officializing" the phrase in 1936, the General As-

sembly apparently wanted to remind us that social education and social action belong together.

Social education has to do with the committee itself, with the officers and leaders of the church, and with the members of the congregation. The purpose here is to increase sensitivity, awareness, and understanding of issues in the light of the church's professed and implied "positions." A related purpose is to help the church's officers and members to know what it means to obey God, both as individual Christians and as a church, in the complicated give-and-take of social relations.

In social action we turn our attention to the community, the state, the nation, the world, and the forces in these so-called "secular" communities that affect the lives of people. Here we seek to exert a direct influence for justice and righteousness, for freedom and fair play, in the social order. Social action is the church "finding its life in engage-

ment with the demonic forces already overcome by Christ."

An excellent resource book for a new committee (for any minister or church leader, for that matter) is *Christian Social Ethics*, by Albert Terrill Rasmussen. He suggests a six-step process by which a committee such as the one you have in mind carries out its work: (1) organize, (2) sensitize, (3) investigate, (4) discuss, (5) decide, (6) act. The first two, you will note, involve the committee in an educational task with itself and the congregation. The direction is inward—upon the church. The last four steps in Rasmussen's list have reference to the external communities, the relationships outside the church.

Well, this should be enough for the present. We trust that our outline of the meaning and scope of social education and action is useful.

Sincerely,

The Department of Social
Education and Action

Theological Ground

Dear Department:

Your letter was greatly appreciated and very useful.

When I read it to the session, however, it stirred up quite a discussion.

So I need more help. Can you give me a short statement of "the theological ground on which we stand" in social education and action?

Yours hopefully,

A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

Greetings.

Here are four brief statements of the theological bases "on which we

stand" in Christian social action.

The first is Article 38 of the Confessional Statement of the United Presbyterian Church of North Amer-

ica. We referred to this declaration in our last letter.

We believe that the divine plan for mankind includes a social order in harmony with the ideals and spirit of Jesus Christ; that the triumph of the Kingdom of God in its present aspect would mean not only its establishment in the hearts of men individually, but a world in which righteousness and brotherhood should prevail; and that a primary duty of the church is to give positive witness that the Christian principles of justice and love should have full expression in all relationships whatsoever—personal, industrial, business, civic, national, and international. (Ex. 20: 1-7; Micah 6: 8; Mark 12: 30-31; Acts 17: 26; Rom. 13: 1-10; Eph. 6: 5-9; Phil. 1: 27; Col. 3: 22 to 4: 1; James 5: 1-6.)

The second is the preamble to the social deliverances of the 167th General Assembly (1955), of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

A basic conviction of our Christian faith is that “man’s chief end is to glorify God.” This implies not only the worship of God, but also obedience to the will of God in all realms of life.

Another fundamental conviction is that God’s Kingdom is present and coming. We believe (1) that we live in a world which is under God’s dominion, but where man is often in rebellion against his purposes; (2) that God, in Christ, has established his kingly power in this world; and (3) that God, in Christ, calls us to work with him.

We believe that the Christian interpretation of life, and the judgment of God in the affairs of men, require the elimination of racism, idolatrous nationalism, communism and other forms of totalitarian heresy.

Therefore neither the church as the body of Christ, nor Christians as individuals, can be indifferent or neutral toward the evil influences in our world. We must take sides in the struggle between light and darkness, recognizing that in all our decisions we too are under judgment, and as Christians share responsibility for the sins of the whole world. Churches and individual Christians who seek to “glorify God” only through hymns and prayers and “living a good life” are sinning against their God.

A third statement that may be useful is the preamble to the General Assembly pronouncements (Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.) of 1956.

Believing that we live in a world that is under the dominion of the sovereign God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that his rule is fully revealed only to his church through Jesus Christ;

Believing that both ignorance of God’s dominion and the refusal to acknowledge and obey him lead men and nations into rebellion against his purposes; and

Believing that this rebellion creates political, economic, and social structures of power that may come under the rule of evil and seek to oppose the sovereignty of God at tragic human cost,

The 168th General Assembly

Reaffirms its conviction that neither the church as the body of Christ, nor any judicatory within it, such as the session, nor individual Christians as members, may ignore or be neutral toward the forces of evil in the world;

Believes that the creation of structures and channels by which love can achieve justice in all the relationships of men and nations is possible.

A fourth brief "statement of faith" for social action is the "conclusion" of the 1956 pronouncements.

In conclusion the 168th General Assembly affirms

—that Christian action in society is not a hobby for those who are interested, nor is it a special-

ized phase of the church's work;

—that the redemption of the cross is most fully preached when the church corporately brings to bear the judgment of God against evil wherever it is seen and seeks at every point of suffering and wrong to reveal the grace of God in the possibilities for salvation, wholeness, and healing;

—that this is in fact the nature and mission of the church;

—that no church is faithful unless it is constantly finding its life in engagement with the demonic forces already overcome by Christ, who has given his church power to exorcise them until his Kingdom is consummated.

Thanks for writing. Let us know how we can continue to help.

Sincerely,
The Department

Controversy

Dear Department:

Your letter with the theological references was very good. The session liked especially the short statement from the United Presbyterian Church. They think it is clear and to the point.

A couple of the elders are saying, however, that social education and action is too controversial for our church. They want to avoid debatable issues.

What shall I tell them?

Yours,

A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

We could almost have predicted that you would run into the idea that social education and action is controversial and has no place in a

church where everything is smooth and happy, and everybody is contented.

A former chief of our Department used to say that the business of the

church is "to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable."

Even so, we feel that it is important for an SEA committee (such as you plan to set up in the Anytown Church) to be careful about raising "controversial questions" too soon—that is, before the committee knows *why* the questions are controversial and *how* a group can engage in creative discussion and decision in spite of rather sharp differences of opinion.

In social education and action we are always dealing with issues, and issues are, by definition, controversial. If people did not have conflicting ideas about them, they wouldn't be issues.

Few people realize the extent to which our thinking about issues is highly colored by the assumptions, many of them unconsciously held, we bring to our consideration of them. On a matter like the so-called race question, for example, our capacity for self-deception is almost unlimited. It is deeply important for a person who holds a certain set of attitudes to understand how he got that way.

That is to say, many convictions held by Mr. A (a hypothetical church member) come from the fact that he is a Christian. Other convictions he strongly clings to are a result of the fact that he is an upper-middle-class, white college graduate living in a business-oriented society. Most of his convictions are invested with emotion. The beliefs and attitudes that have strong "moral" overtones he tends to lump together under the label "Christian."

The church Mr. A and his family

attend is filled with people like himself—at least with reference to the intensity and variety of the convictions they hold. So when Mr. A and his fellow church members begin to discuss an issue that lodges in an area where they have strong convictions, the likelihood is great that more heat than light will be developed, unless they are all aware of standing together on some common ground and of striving together toward some common goal.

All this emphasizes the value of a sound theological orientation. It also points up the importance of appreciating the extent to which we are conditioned, all of us, by our various backgrounds. A prerequisite to responsible social action is at least an elementary understanding of the way the church (especially the local church) is affected by the culture in which it lives.

So we raise this warning against plunging your committee (when you have it set up) into controversial issues before it has considered what it means to study, discuss, decide, and act on these issues as Christians and as members of the Christian community.

Creative discussions of controversial subjects are relatively easy to bring off in groups such as local units of the American Civil Liberties Union or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, because such agencies are composed of people who come together precisely because of their common interest in, and convictions about, the particular issue or "area of concern" the agency is meant to

serve. No such unanimity of social attitude unites the people who are members of a Presbyterian church. Some belong to one political party, some another. They are liberal and conservative. They are interested, disinterested, and hostile toward civil liberties. With regard to race relations, they are sensitive and insensitive, experienced and inexperienced, biased and objective.

They are also Christian. This fact ought to color and inform their attitudes and convictions on the controversial questions of our social, economic, and political life. This ought to be the case, but it is not

at all likely to be true of the great majority of people in our church or in yours. It is imperative that your committee (and the people of the congregation) come to an understanding of what it means to have their attitudes and evaluations determined and colored by the fact that they are Christians and members of the Christian community.

We seem to have used a lot of words to make our point. We trust that these ramblings do not discourage you from writing again.

Sincerely,

The Department

Individual vs. Corporate Action

Dear Department:

Here I am again.

Your letter was heavy going, mostly because it gave me some new ideas (or, rather, challenged some old ones). I see the importance of not jumping into controversial matters too fast.

I bought the book by Rasmussen you recommended (Christian Social Ethics) and have been reading the chapter on the "sea of influence" in which we all live. I never realized how much our attitudes and decisions are influenced by our backgrounds.

I heard a speaker on race relations last week say that prejudice is more a result than a cause of segregation. I am beginning to see that he may be right—at least partly right.

Our committee, when it is organized, will have to go into this business of attitudes on controversial issues very carefully. The church and the gospel should be more of a factor in our thinking than it is for most of us who call ourselves Christians.

This leads to my question. Is the job of the church in social education and action to get church members to think and act as Christians in the social order? Or should the church itself try to do something about social problems?

Yours,

A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

Your question is a good one.

It surely is the job of the church to teach and inspire its members so that their social attitudes and decisions reflect the spirit of Christ.

It is also the business of the church itself, as a Christian community, to make its influence felt in the world's life. There is hesitation and resistance in accepting this idea, however, by some church people who say that the church should avoid controversy and "stay out of politics."

We find it useful to think in terms of three kinds of (Christian) social action—individual, group, and corporate.

By *individual* social action we mean what a single person seeks to do, as a Christian, in involving himself in the struggle for social justice. He speaks and acts for himself alone, and no one else. He is encouraged to believe that he speaks for Christ and for the church, and he may well be right in this belief. It is indicated, of course, that he not give wide publicity to the fact that he is acting as a Christian. Karl Barth is probably wise, both theologically and pragmatically, when he says that the Christian who participates in government or civil activities ought to do so anonymously, so far as his fellows are concerned.

By *group* social action (a very awkward phrase) we have in mind what a unit of the church, such as a women's circle, or a youth group, or a men's organization, may seek to do in dealing with public issues of one kind or another. The important thing here is that the group speak and act for itself as a group, and for no one else—certainly not for

the church. It is understood, of course, that the group is "answerable" to the session.

Corporate social action is the church itself, as a corporate entity, seeking to be a faithful instrument of God's action in the world. This can happen as a result of a vote of the congregation. It is usually the session, however, that speaks and acts for the church, and it is empowered to do so. Or the session may authorize or delegate a responsible member of the church or an appropriate committee (such as a committee on social education and action) to represent the church or to speak for it on a particular occasion. In some cases, not often, the minister will be in a position to speak or act for the church, knowing that the session will "back him up."

We would like to point out, as an "aside," that every church, whether it wants to or not, engages rather frequently in "corporate social action." When a church, through session or congregational action, makes a decision about the location of its building, the scope and inclusiveness of its activities, the content of its educational program, the use of its facilities, the spending of its money, the policies governing its program of evangelistic outreach, the support of community agencies and programs, the participation of the church in co-operative ventures of various kinds, you can be sure that the church is engaging in *corporate* actions that have wide social implications.

Keep on writing—we enjoy "talking" to you.

Sincerely,

The Department

II

Responsible Leadership

The Session

Dear Department:

Thanks again for your letter.

*Our session is really impressed with the idea of "corporate" social action.
Can you elaborate on what the session ought to do?*

Yours,

A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

We are glad to hear that the idea of "corporate" social action seems to be getting over in your session in Anytown.

We included in an earlier letter what the 1956 General Assembly pronouncements (in the concluding section) said about the "corporate" action of the church. The idea here is that the local church most truly teaches the gospel and most completely realizes the meaning of its life in Christ when it comes into encounter with the social forces of our day. If that is true, the minister and elders, and other leaders, need to have some understanding of these forces. They are the key persons of the church so far as the general direction in which it moves and the quality of its life and witness are concerned.

What can the session do to lead the church into encounters with the world that are creative rather than destructive? We offer a half dozen suggestions.

1. The session members should keep themselves informed, through study and discussion, about recent and current social deliverances of the General Assembly. We know of one session, for example, that spends the first half hour of several meetings every year discussing a portion of the pronouncements. The "positions" and recommendations in the pronouncements are important guide words for the church in both policy and action. A discussion of a proposed relocation of a church building, or a program of parish outreach, or a letter to a Senator about

foreign aid could hardly be said to be adequate, or entirely responsible, without taking into account the General Assembly statements specifically addressed to these issues.

2. The session should keep itself informed as to current developments in the community, and also as to developments (in certain "areas of concern") in the state and nation. Since this is hardly possible simply as a result of reading newspapers, the elders (deacons and trustees as well) may receive periodic reports from members of the church and from outside "experts" who are involved in community activities or who are reliable interpreters of current events. These reports will have to do with such proposals as a school board issue, a state FEPC law, a curfew ordinance, or the sponsoring of a community center or a mental health program by a local civic group.

3. The session may decide, on the basis of its understanding of current issues and after deliberation, that God calls upon its church to raise its voice or to engage in some action relevant to a particular situation. It may, for example, instruct one or more of its members, especially qualified and prepared, to give testimony in the name of the church at a public hearing of the city council on rent control or zoning or urban renewal or school aid. Any issue in which justice or human welfare is involved would seem to be a legitimate area for the church's action. Indeed, a good case on Scriptural grounds could be made for the indictment

and reproof of any church that failed (or refused) to involve itself in such an issue.

4. It is important for the session to consider ways in which the church can co-operate with other churches in the community in programs of Christian action. This is accomplished primarily through a city or county council of churches, although sometimes the churches of a neighborhood may band together to attack a local problem or need. We should keep in mind that co-operative church action should be directed not to trivial matters (as so often is the case), but to the really important issues of justice, human rights, community welfare. It is usually true that these issues are dealt with better by a group of co-operating churches than by the "individual" action of separate churches.

5. From time to time the session may wish to enlist the help of various groups in the church in both study and action related to social issues. The men's council, for example, may be asked to get the facts about population changes in the neighborhood, or to provide "observers" who will attend open meetings of the city council or township commission. The deacons may be directed to make a survey of family service agencies in the community. The youth organization, at the session's request, may study (and perhaps test) the racial practices of restaurants and other places of public accommodation in the town (a project suitable for most communities in the "North" and "West").

We dare say that in many churches it has not occurred to the elders or to the minister that the session can "involve" the various church organizations in its work.

6. The session would do well to look carefully into the fiscal and employment practices of the church, and of firms engaged in construction or repair work for the church, to see that the church in no avoidable way contributes to or condones any social injustice or insensitivity. The session is clearly responsible for this kind of "spiritual oversight" of the church's life.

7. The session should always be concerned about the "social climate" of the church, as reflected in the attitudes of the members. For example, if anti-Semitic or "racist" comments are frequently heard, obviously one aspect of the church's social education is being neglected. Social education, of course, is part of the important work assigned (by the session) to the Christian education committee of the church.

Well, these add up to seven suggestions instead of six. We trust that your session will find them useful.

Cordially,
The Department

The Minister

Dear Department:

We had an exciting time in our last session meeting when we talked over the session's responsibility in social education and action. The minister pressed us pretty hard about the importance of this part of our work.

We would like to get back at him (in a friendly way and for the good of the cause) by discussing in our next meeting "the minister's job in social education and action."

Do you have anything to suggest?

In haste,
A. Layman

P.S. The minister knows that I am writing to you, so everything is all right. At first we were kidding when we scheduled this topic for the next meeting, but the preacher wants us to take it up as a serious assignment.

Dear Mr. Layman:

We take our several hats off to you and to your pastor. You are going about this business of discovering what we mean by social education and action in the church in a sensible way.

The key person, of course, in the church's program of social education and action is the minister. A church is seldom able to go beyond his encouragement and leadership in dealing with social questions.

Most ministers are alert to their

responsibility in this aspect of the church's work. They know that the church is faithless unless it "finds its life in engagement with the demonic forces" in society. Rarely does one find a minister who says that community problems are no concern of the churches.

We would like to make our recommendations under four headings.

1. Many ministers think of their social action role primarily in terms of preaching. Sermons are important, and we wish that every minister's preaching would give due and timely emphasis to the meaning of Christian obedience in the struggle for social justice. Prophetic preaching has always been a great stimulus for responsible Christian action.

But not for all who hear. Preachers are sorely tempted to overestimate the power of preaching to produce action, or even to change minds, on social questions. When a preacher girds and delivers himself in denunciation of social sin, it is often a moving experience for himself alone. The people who hear him may applaud his courage and approve his idealism, but very little happens.

We need to know much more than we do now about how social attitudes are formed and changed, and how people are stirred to act as Christians. We do know that sermons are not enough. Still, they are the minister's unique opportunity for social witness.

On the whole, "concerned" preaching is best when it is not obvious. That is, repeated references to the need for obedience in the so-

cial realm in sermons that are not addressed specifically to social issues are perhaps more effective, and carry people farther, than occasional homilies about the responsibilities of Christians in reference to specific issues. Indeed, some outstanding leaders in this field seldom preach "social action" sermons.

2. Sometimes a minister may feel that he has fulfilled his obligation in social action when he takes part in community fund campaigns, serves on hospital boards, acts now and then as chaplain for the city council, helps to mediate a strike, accepts a committee assignment in the P.T.A., speaks to the Rotary Club, and leads a delegation to call on the mayor. We are in favor of this sort of extr clerical activity. We should remember, however, that social action is much more than keeping busy with community affairs.

Ministers may be expected to give encouragement and help to a variety of worthy causes—movements and organizations with goals similar to those of the churches in such fields as race relations, housing, civic righteousness, world order, economic justice, human rights, citizenship. Participation in these causes is proper for a minister so long as there are no embarrassing associations and no compromise of the church's witness.

Many ministers are known for their courage, as well as for their Christian discretion and discrimination, in supporting worthy causes. To see their names on a list of sponsors is assurance of an activity's

worthiness and of its importance.

Not infrequently, however, a minister with a wide reputation for community leadership in Christian social action does a rather disappointing job in his own church. Perhaps he conceives his social action role primarily in terms of secular relationships outside the church. Perhaps he does not recognize the rich possibilities for social education and action in the ongoing program of the church.

3. No group in the local church is more important for the minister to encourage in social action than the officers—elders, deacons, trustees. The minister, for one thing, can see to it that church officers are selected who represent a variety of occupational interests and political points of view. Nothing is more deadening than a lack of diversity in social outlook among members of a church board. The minister should also plan the officers' meetings so as to include a training period with appropriate attention to the social concerns of the church.

Members of church boards often express happy surprise when they learn for the first time that the church is trying to do something about many of the tough problems in community and national life. This is an aspect of the church's work concerning which church officers ought to be deeply interested and fully informed. But how can they be so unless the ministers tell them and help them to understand?

We already have referred to the importance of the officers' having a knowledge of current and recent so-

cial deliverances of the General Assembly. Many ministers make the pronouncements the subject of careful study in session meetings, or in joint meetings of church boards. The men may sometimes disagree with some of the positions taken by the church in General Assembly actions. That is their right. All the more, it is important for them to appraise the pronouncements and weigh the pros and cons of the church's positions as well as their own.

We know of a church that annually prepares a digest of selected General Assembly deliverances along with appropriate actions of its own on national and local issues. This "social action report" is then read from the pulpit and implemented in the program of the church.

4. Another key group of leaders in the church are the men and women who are involved in the ongoing activities—church school leaders, officers of various organizations for men and women, advisers in the youth program, members of various church committees. These people, as well as the church officers, ought to be convinced and informed regarding the social action program of the church. The minister will want to give them about the same treatment he gives the church officers in making them aware and ready. The General Assembly's social deliverances, for example, may be distributed among them and discussed in a church-wide workers' conference.

A unique opportunity of the minister is that of advising the leaders with regard to the social education and action phases of the church's

program. He can suggest ways in which the activities of the various groups in the church, in both education and action, can be made socially relevant.

Program materials provided by the denomination for youth and adult groups, as well as in the educational curriculum, give a great deal of attention to "applied Christianity." The minister can help the responsible leaders to see the importance of these materials and to make appropriate selections and adaptations in the light of local conditions. He can assist in recruiting resource leaders when specialized subjects are discussed. When a program moves from study to action, the minister's leadership is indispensable.

Often the minister is in a position

to know about meetings and conferences of various kinds relating to the social concerns of the church. He will urge the leaders of his church who are most concerned with these events to attend and to take part. To the minister's desk come many communications and a great deal of printed matter relating to social action. Much of this material can be passed along to persons carrying responsibilities in the church's program. Key leaders in the church, including members of the church boards, should be encouraged to read *SOCIAL PROGRESS*.

Well, this is enough for now. We hope your discussion in the session meeting about the minister's role in social action is successful.

Cordially yours,

The Department



The above cartoon and those on page 26 and the back cover are drawn by Rev. Thomas C. (Tom) Arthur, Minister of the First Presbyterian Church, Greenfield, Indiana.

III

Getting Down to Cases

Community Relations

Dear Department:

This is the Anytown Church reporting progress.

Our church officers are really getting interested in social education and action. Our minister tells me (on the side) that he has been waiting for a long time for this interest to develop. I can see now that he has been leading us toward this moment ever since he came to our church four years ago.

In the session meeting last night the minister said that social action and evangelism are so closely related to each other that they should be thought of as twins. Both of them are ways by which the church tries to do the work of Christ among men. Evangelism, he says, tries to persuade individuals to accept Christ and to enlist in the Christian cause. Social action seeks to bring our social practices into harmony with God's will as revealed in Christ. Each is incomplete without the other, says our minister.

The session asked me to bring to the next meeting, in two weeks, some recommendations for community action. Do you have any suggestions?

Sincerely,
A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

Your minister is absolutely right when he says that evangelism and social action in the church are closely related. The purpose of both is to encourage men, and to make it possible for them, to respond to God's will as revealed in Christ and to live together as God's people.

As to community action, let us cite three examples.

First, a church in the Southwest

sometime ago hit upon the idea of appointing persons, usually a man and wife, to represent the church in each of several community organizations "which had goals in common with those of the church." A half dozen community organizations were selected, after careful study, as those with which the church could usefully co-operate. Over a period of several years, these representatives were welcomed by, and worked in,

the organizations *as representatives of the church*. They reported regularly to the social education and action committee of the church, which made a summary report to the session every month. Thus the church was kept informed of important and interesting developments in the community and was able to give its support to, and co-operate in, many worth-while projects.

Secondly, several churches have made surveys of the "community involvements" of their members. Such a study usually reveals a much wider and deeper participation in community life on the part of church members than is commonly supposed to be true. It would be useful for the session, through the social education and action committee, to arrange an annual or even a semiannual meeting of the members of the church who are deeply involved in civic activities—members of city councils or township commissions, city or town officials, judges, social workers, board members of community agencies, officers and leaders in various civic organizations, school administrators and teachers, heads of important institutions of the community. A meeting of this sort is bound to have many useful side effects. The church will discover many things it should say and do as the instrument of God's will in the community.

Thirdly, a church in the Middle West sponsors annually a neighborhood conference to which are invited board and staff members of all "serv-

ice" and "action" agencies in the community. The meeting usually begins on Sunday afternoon and runs through the evening. Those attending are guests of the church at the dinner hour. The agency representatives are given opportunities to describe the purpose and nature of their work. This is followed by a discussion of ways in which the churches and the agencies can work together for common objectives in the community. Such a conference would be all the more effective if it were sponsored not by a single church, but by several churches in the community. It could even become an interfaith project.

What we are really suggesting in the use of the above illustrations is that the church should discover who its allies are in the community and should enter into effective working relations with them. Indeed, any church venturing into social action should get to know as quickly as possible the organizations and programs nearby that are working toward similar goals.

If you wish to pursue this farther, may we suggest *The Church and the Community*, a study-action course developed and published by the Department of Social Education and Action. The materials include an Instructor's Manual (\$1.00), and a Discussion Guide (50 cents) for each member of the group, and can be ordered from your nearest PDS.

All power to you.

Sincerely,

The Department

Dear Department:

Your last letter was wonderful because it was down to earth. Our talk about social action in the session meetings has been pretty vague and theoretical. But in our meeting last night, when I read your letter with the examples of what some churches are doing, the elders were really challenged.

At our next meeting—a special one just for this purpose—the minister will lead us in a “social action” Bible study. Then I am to report on the kinds of social problems the church should be worried about.

Can you help me out? Don’t write my speech for me—just put me on the right track.

Yours,

A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

We think that you, your minister, and your session are all very much on the right track.

Your question about the kinds of issues we should worry about is a good one. It gives us a chance to say some things we think are important.

First of all, a word about two common misconceptions regarding social issues confronting the churches.

1. Some churchmen, even a few ministers, think that the urgent issues that should command our full attention in social action are the ones that have to do with the bad behavior of other people—problems such as “bingo,” pari-mutuel betting, slot machines, salacious literature, Sabbath-breaking. (The list used to include dancing and using tobacco.)

The church’s approach to these problems is likely to be one that suggests, See how bad the people are who do these things (and see how good we are who lambaste these peo-

ple and the evil things they do !

Sometimes our concern about the problems of alcohol, about juvenile delinquency, even about the efforts of parochial schools to get public support, reflects a “moralistic” approach.

Now the problems we have mentioned may from time to time become critical. We would be the last to say that they are unimportant, never deserve attention, and have no place on the agenda of social action. Do not misunderstand us—we are glad that some sensitive and responsible church leaders are worried about these issues.

What we warn against is the “judgmental” approach and the limiting of social concern to the so-called “moralistic” issues.

2. Another fallacy is to confuse social action with social service. These terms have come to represent quite clearly defined and different kinds of Christian activity.

Social service has to do with the relief of human misery and misfortune. Churches in our larger cities

often support neighborhood houses, welfare programs of hospitals, orphanages, community fund campaigns, counseling services in courts. The need is so vast, however, as to be way beyond the capacity of voluntary programs. Large-scale social service is a function of tax-supported public agencies.

Social action seeks to change social and economic conditions so that they will better serve man's needs (his body and his spirit) and not result in such a great burden of human misery. It tries to work toward specific standards that bear upon human welfare such as fair play for the workingman (and for the investor), equal employment opportunities, ethical business practices, wholesome living conditions, justice, and human rights.

We believe that Christian obedience requires that we engage in both social service and social action. Our point here is to emphasize the difference between the two and to warn against thinking of social service as being synonymous with social action.

In the second place, we would like to identify what we believe to be the most important "areas of concern." The groupings we use are rather arbitrary. They are not the "last word"—they are simply a handy way to describe the issues we ought to be worried about.

1. Community responsibilities. Adequate housing for everyone, high-grade public schools, wholesome recreation, cultural opportunities—these are valid objects of Christian action. The church will

work *preventively* in combating crime and delinquency, in securing justice in the courts and adequate law enforcement, and in controlling things that undermine human welfare and morality. It will work *constructively* in promoting good government and in developing the resources that improve the community and enrich the lives of its citizens.

2. Problems of alcohol. The churches have long recognized the use of alcoholic beverages (particularly excessive drinking) as a factor in a variety of social ills—disorderly behavior, family discord, inefficiency and absenteeism among workers, dangerous conditions on public highways, the breakdown of health, and skid row. The issue is a delicate one, however, because of the widening acceptance of social drinking among people (including church members) who used to support the principle of abstinence. The approach of the churches should emphasize (a) the need for understanding alcoholism and providing sensible help for alcoholics and their families, (b) the need for a broad program of education that is reliable in its "facts" and presents a sound basis for voluntary abstinence, and (c) public action to control the sale and use of alcoholic beverages.

3. Economic life. Down through the centuries the churches have been concerned about what people do for a living and how groups of people deal with one another in their economic relations. Churches today are interested in the rights and responsibilities of various economic groups—labor, management, agriculture,

government employees, the professions, consumers, people who have retired. Economic policies relating to taxation, conservation of natural resources, inflation, international trade, and business depression are also a concern of the churches because of their bearing on the daily lives of people in this country and in other lands. A rather new "front" in this area of concern has to do with the social responsibilities of Christians in their daily work.

4. Civil liberties. The churches must continue to be vigilant in upholding the basic human values represented so clearly in the Bill of Rights. These rights are rooted in the Christian teaching of the dignity and worth of the individual under God. We are irresponsible and disobedient if we flag in the stout defense of our God-given freedoms.

5. Racial and cultural relations. We would say (as did the General Assembly in 1957) that the most pressing domestic issue before the American people, the one national issue that above all others tests the faithfulness of our churches, is racial segregation. The problem here is not brotherhood, however worthy that goal is, but justice—the right of a free man in a free nation, freely and without fear, to live, to work, to play, to study, to worship, to travel, to eat, to use public accommodations, to buy and sell, to serve and be served, without regard to the color of his skin or any other racial "trait" that bears not at all on his essential fitness for these things or his ability to use them with as much benefit and dignity as anyone else. (Pardon us for getting al-

most "emotional" on this subject; it is one about which we have, and believe the churches should have, very strong feelings.)

6. International affairs. The churches are concerned with "the things that make for peace." They are concerned too about the welfare and rights of the people of other lands—including (should we say especially?) the people who live in the underdeveloped regions, now called (in the vernacular of the World Council of Churches) "the areas of rapid social change." The looming problems in world relations today, as the churches see them, are (a) disarmament, including the making and testing of nuclear weapons and missiles, (b) international economic aid, including a category of growing importance, technical assistance, (c) the extension of international trade, and (d) the peaceful development of atomic power. Our church, by the way, has been consistent and vigorous in advocating strong support of the United Nations and its agencies.

7. Government and citizenship. This is an "area" that overlaps all the other areas of social concern we have been talking about. There comes a time when nearly every issue we are called, in obedience, to deal with becomes political, requires legislation, or involves the government (local, state, national). The important principle of separation of church and state in the American tradition does not mean that we cease to be interested in an issue when it becomes a matter of political interest (or a politician's interest) or of legislative action. Christians

should strive for good government on all political levels, should seek to be informed about platforms and issues, should help elect qualified (really qualified—not merely "good") people to public office, should consider public service as a vocation, and should take an active part in the political parties of their choice.

We wonder if you're still with us. This letter has turned out to be an essay, but there is actually a lot more to be said, and we could say it.

Perhaps you didn't want to know this much about "the issues."

But it is your fault. You asked a "leading" question.

Cordially,
The Department

What Can We Do?

Dear Department:

You sure did say a lot in your last chapter—I mean, letter.

It was all good—so useful that we want more of the same.

This time can you tell us what a church (like ours in Anytown) can do about the issues you described?

*Yours (again and again),
A. Layman*

Dear Mr. Layman:

Your capacity is incredible. As for us, we are so full of our subject that we could go on and on and on....

Our great desire, of course, is that the church in Anytown, and in every town, come alive in social education and action. This encounter via the air mails with your session and with its remarkable chairman of SEA is one of the most refreshing things to happen to us since the Braves set up their wigwams in Milwaukee.

The question in your recent letter is another teaser. We will try to keep ourselves under control by suggesting a "do it yourself" for each of the seven areas of concern we listed in our last correspondence.

1. Many churches have taken seriously the public schools Statement developed by the Board of Christian Education of our church and approved by the General Assembly in 1957. Here are some suggestions for a local "follow-up" based on letters from a number of churches. (a) The session should study the Statement. (b) A series of study-discussion meetings can be arranged for the members of the church and people in the community. (c) Copies of the Statement can be sent to school board members, school administrators, community groups interested in the schools. (d) The church's social education and action committee can undertake a survey of school conditions and needs through visits to schools, inter-

views with school officials, consultations with school specialists. (e) Members of the church can be encouraged to be active in parents' associations and in other groups working for good schools and to report what they learn and observe to the SEA committee. (f) The session can adopt resolutions approving such things as fair pay for teachers, reasonable school bond issues, Federal aid to education (perhaps for specific purposes such as salaries and buildings), less luxury and frills and more functionalism in new school construction, and other proposals aimed at improving public education in the American tradition. (g) These resolutions should be sent, with due regard to good "timing," to the "decision makers" in school affairs and to the press. (h) Special activities can be arranged, as specific projects or as regular program features, for teachers. For example, new teachers in the schools can be welcomed in some appropriate way.

2. As to the problems of alcohol we would like to suggest a study-action project. The study part can be a series of five or six conveniently scheduled meetings, for youth and adults of both the church and the community. The study sessions can be led by the minister and/or a panel of "experts" and resource persons. General Assembly pronouncements on alcohol, especially those of 1946, 1953, and 1954, can be the basis of the study. Special issues of SOCIAL PROGRESS dealing with alcohol (March, 1955, and November, 1957) would be useful. As for subsequent action, a team of persons can be recruited to assist

the minister in counseling with and assisting alcoholics and their families. The group should include a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, a doctor, a social worker, a lawyer, and (if possible) a psychiatrist. This project would be especially appropriate in a community that does not have an "information center" on alcoholism. Another project would be to encourage (and assist) the local high school in introducing a unit on the problems of alcohol in its instruction program—perhaps in a basic course in hygiene or physical education.

3. It would be good for a church to make a study of its membership to discover such facts as the vocations and occupations represented, the approximate range of incomes, the educational backgrounds, the political affiliations and activities, the involvement of the members in various economic and vocational groups (labor unions, employer associations, business and trade organizations, professional bodies, farm groups, consumer organizations). A survey of this sort, because of its nature, can best be done by the minister and a small group of trusted and responsible leaders—not more than half a dozen, perhaps. The study should reveal (a) the extent to which the congregation is a fair "cross section" of the community, (b) the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the church in ministering to various economic groups in the community, (c) the extent to which all groups in the church are recognized in such things as the se-

lection of church officers and the setting up of important committees.

The charge is often made that Presbyterian churches are "upper middle class" in their appeal. We do not believe this charge is generally true. But it is up to each church to discover the facts of its own life. An interesting and useful project, by the way, would be the holding of a series of conversations (attendance carefully selected and limited) on what it means to be a Christian in our daily work. We have ideas about how this can be carried on, in case you are ever interested.

4. Presbyterian leaders and churches have a great tradition of defending the civil rights of all the people. It would be good for a church to have a "working relationship" with a community organization, if there is one, that is especially interested in civil liberty, and is at once reliable, courageous, and fair in documenting local cases in which basic rights have been violated. Perhaps a dependable person from the church who is interested in this issue can be "instructed" by the session to serve as a one-man (or woman) "watchdog committee" on civil rights. The church should not be afraid to take appropriate action in a citizen's defense when his rights are injured, even though some powerful groups in the community may be on the other side. We are the kind of church that obeys God and is not afraid.

5. In the critical area of race relations, we can cite several examples of Negro churches (a) setting up voters' clinics to prepare

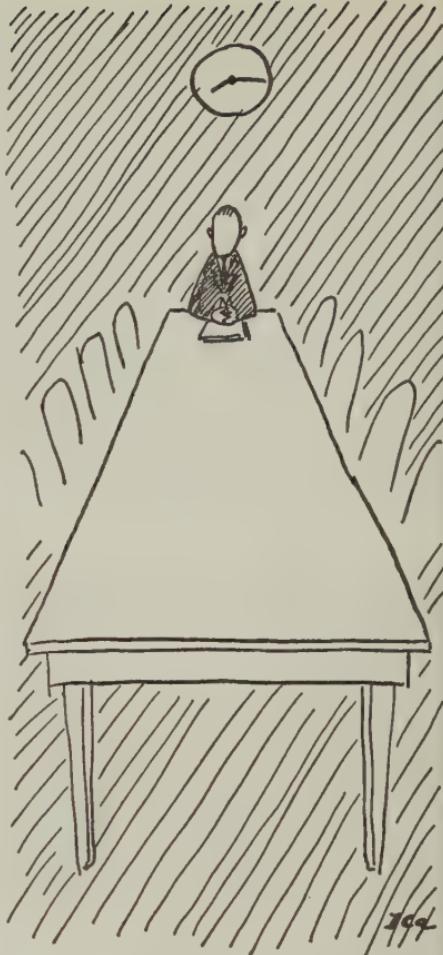
Negro citizens for registration in areas where Negro men and women have seldom been able to register and vote (but where things are likely to be a little different now because of 1957 civil rights legislation), (b) negotiating with businessmen for the purpose of opening up new jobs for Negro workers, (c) persuading local newspapers to give fair and courteous attention to news about people and events in the Negro community, (d) taking steps to establish (in some communities to re-establish) useful conversations between representatives of the Negro and white population for the purpose of promoting understanding and co-operation, (e) taking the lead in efforts to banish segregation in public life (schools, buses, parks, residential neighborhoods, hospitals, restaurants, libraries, employment opportunities, public facilities of various kinds). We believe that white churches should consider and do likewise. (By the way, we have been assuming that your church in Anytown is predominantly white in its membership. Could we be wrong about this?)

6. A modest Baptist church in Philadelphia (social action is not for Presbyterians alone) has assembled a "museum of international good will." The exhibit includes a group of sixty-five flags from as many nations—given by the embassies in Washington. There are framed letters of friendship and greeting from statesmen of the countries donating the flags. Included also are some five hundred examples of arts and crafts of many nations—all contributed and many quite val-

able. In a service of dedication (which was interracial, intercultural, and international in character), churchmen and Government representatives from several countries attended and participated. This is the sort of "international relations" project we like. It involves an exchange of letters with key persons in the Governments of many lands. It contributes to a better mutual understanding of the cultures, needs, and aspirations of all peoples. It results in deepening interest in American foreign policies as they affect these lands—in foreign aid, for example, as a present urgent issue in foreign affairs.

7. As for citizenship, we know a church in an Eastern city that has a citizens' forum during every important election campaign. The session even dares, and manages, to have rival candidates for a seat in the United States Senate come to the forum and submit to friendly questioning on succeeding nights. This church takes earnestly the admonition of the 1955 General Assembly to make available to church members reliable information on issues and candidates.

Well, this letter isn't quite as long as our last. We could have made it longer (and perhaps more exciting) but we grew weary from so much action. How are you after reading all these high-powered pages?



The SEA committee will meet promptly at 7:30 P.M.

Let us hear from you. But we know we will. Anyway, we are all for you and the good work you are doing.

Cordially,
The Department

IV

Every Member

In the Ongoing Program

Dear Department:

You are right—our membership is made up almost entirely of “white” people. Our janitor, who is a Negro, is an officer in a Methodist church a few blocks away, but his wife and daughter have joined our church. His daughter, by the way, works part time in our church office.

Our minister tells us that it is the official policy of the Presbyterian Church to welcome everybody who wants to become a member. Our session has talked this over very carefully. We believe that it is not enough to welcome people of all races; we have to go out and invite them to come.

Your last letter was very exciting. It gave us many ideas of what we can do about the issues.

So far we have been talking almost altogether about the session and its job in social education and action. Can you give us some suggestions for the church school, for the young people’s program, and for other groups and activities in the church?

I hope this is not too much of a “leading” question—I don’t want to wear you out.

Yours,
A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

Your question about social education and action in the ongoing work of the church is another “teaser”—and we are quite sure you knew this when you wrote. We’ll try to keep this reasonably short (by our standards, and we are old-fashioned). We are glad we’re not doing this by telephone.

First of all, let us say something about social education as a “dimension” of Christian education.

As we see Christian education, it is directed to the whole person in all his relationships and responsibilities. In the nurture of its members, the church should help them to understand the nature of God whom we worship and serve, and to re-

spond to what God is doing in the world. One of the church's aims in its educational program is a Christian fellowship in which the members individually and together are instruments of God's will in the social order. Social education is the "dimension" of Christian education by which this aim is served.

By the educational program, we mean all the activities of the church that have Christian nurture (or training) as their main purpose. We mean the Sunday church school with its classes and activities for all age groups. We mean other "regular" activities such as Sunday evening youth groups, organizations for men and women, and various weekday meetings (to the extent to which they are "educational"). We mean also such special activities as study groups, church family nights, and leadership education events.

The point we would like to make is that in the educational program social education should not be treated or thought of as a "program emphasis," to be stressed only on certain occasions such as during United Nations Week or Race Relations Sunday. We need to think of social education as an aspect or, as we prefer to put it, as a "dimension" of all phases of Christian education in the church.

In the second place, we would like to say something about social education in the various parts of the ongoing program of the church.

1. As for the church school, the materials provided in the *Christian Faith and Life* curriculum for par-

ents and teachers as well as for learners strongly emphasize the responsibilities of Christians and of the church. The trouble is that providing materials of the right sort is no guarantee that social education actually will be adequately emphasized in the church's program of education. It is important that these matters be given attention also in conferences for workers and in departmental meetings of parents and teachers. The declared positions of the church on social questions should be known and understood by all leaders in the educational activities of the church.

It would seem important to select teachers and other workers who are able to interpret with conviction and honesty the broad social concerns of the gospel. They should be persons who are not out of step with the church's stand on important issues. This is all the more important when we realize that social attitudes are "caught rather than taught."

2. In the youth fellowship program, the citizenship area is the point of contact for the youth of the local church with the social education and action program on every level from the particular church to the General Assembly. Social education is strongly emphasized in the program resources for our young people, particularly in the youth fellowship Kits. The citizenship chairman of the local youth group will be alert both to the "follow-up" possibilities of the topics in the Kits, and to the program suggestions coming to him from his counterparts in the presbytery, synod, and national youth organizations.

The weakness of social education and action at the level of youth work in the local church is that for the most part it is an "armchair" discussion or "spectator" program. Despite the fact that the topics on race relations, on the United Nations, on politics, and on other social subjects are often more readable and incisive in the Kits than in the resources available to other groups in the church, there is still, in most churches, no concept of "youth social action" that goes beyond such "tricks" as panel discussions and role-playing. Remember also that there is wide suspicion, supported by such studies as the Purdue opinion poll on civil liberties, that the high school and college young people of today are relatively indifferent and conservative (rather than interested, informed, and liberal) with respect to some of the crucial problems of our social, political, and economic life. This points up the importance of deliberately involving the youth of the church in community action projects of various kinds as a part of their social education.

Young people especially need to see the high school, which encompasses so much of their life, as the arena of Christian social action for them. Here is where they need to exercise the critique, and be involved in the interaction, that bring, within the limits of their competence, the insights of the Christian faith to bear upon the world's life.

3. Young adults in the church
are usually aware of their social responsibilities as Christians. At least, in the hard business of establishing homes and finding themselves in sat-

isfying and useful vocations, many aspects of Christian ethics and social relations are very real to them. In meetings and activities planned by and for young adults, it is usually quite easy to emphasize the social aspects of Christian education. Program units for this important age group can deal realistically with the issues of war and peace, economic problems that bear upon their daily life, problems of community improvement, and the broad issues of human rights.

4. In the program for Presbyterian women, social education and action is a "built-in" feature. If the local group uses the plan of organization recommended by the women's leaders of our church, and uses program resources developed by the national group, there will be no difficulty in involving the women in social education and action.

5. As for local chapters of Presbyterian men, the national organization recommends that among several standing committees there be one that deals with civic responsibilities. Here we would direct you to the official organization materials and program resources for Presbyterian men's councils.

6. Sunday evening and mid-week "services" can be occasions for dealing with the social responsibilities of Christians. Many churches observe "social action" days and seasons such as World Order Sunday, Human Rights Day, Church and Economic Life Week, and Brotherhood Month, by means of special Sunday or weekday evening meet-

ings. Sometimes a series of midweek or Sunday night services can be devoted to a study of the social teachings of the Bible or to an interpretation of selected issues. Church family nights can be used for special studies on Christian social concern.

7. We will take time now only to mention three other parts of the educational program of the church in which social education, as an ever-present emphasis, is a must. These are (a) **leadership education**, (b) **church officer training**, and (c) **classes for new members**. Here again we would say that if the recommended materials and resources are used, there should be no difficulty in giving proper attention to this business of discovering and doing God's will in the social order.

In the third place, let us emphasize the extent to which everything depends on the local leaders—to the degree, at least, that they have the power to ruin a study unit or program that was intended to move the church forward in the field of social education and action.

A dominating figure in a large men's Bible class, for example, resists the suggestion that questions "be opened for discussion," because this would invite the possibility of disagreement and controversy. A women's organization throws out a highly recommended and widely used study program in the field of race relations because some leaders in the group find the subject "revolting." A church school superintendent recruits workers "who will teach the Bible and not the newspaper." As a result, Christian disciples in the making are led to think of religion as being unrelated to daily life.

The session has great responsibility here in both the proper selection and the adequate training of the persons who hold places of influence in the church.

Well, this is enough for now. We don't want to bore you overmuch. This is important stuff (so we think, but some people say we are biased). However, we are sure you will find it more interesting in the doing than in the reading.

Cordially,
The Department

Especially the Women

Dear Department:

Thanks again for your letter. My job as chairman for social education and action in the Anytown Church is becoming more and more interesting. I can see now that I will need lots of help. The session wants me to tell you how much we all appreciate your very good suggestions.

Now the reason for this letter is that my wife has been elected secretary for social education and action in the women's association of our church. She has read all your letters, but she thinks that you might have something special to say about the SEA program of the women's groups.

I told her to write to you, but she said that since I know you so well (at least on paper) I should do the writing.

So please send us a few words—something like a women's guide to social education and action.

*Cordially yours,
A. Layman*

Dear Mrs. Layman:

Congratulations on your new appointment! We are happy to have you on our team. Here are a few suggestions to help you get started.

In all well-organized associations of Presbyterian women there is a program department which includes a secretary for social education and action as well as leaders for spiritual life and stewardship, missionary education, and literature. In very small associations, one person (the program secretary) carries all four assignments. The presence of the SEA secretary in the program department is indication that the women mean business in including our pet emphasis in their work.

As the SEA secretary works in the program department, she has a particular relationship to each facet of the program, as well as to the program as a whole. She works, for example, with the spiritual life secretary in building plans for Bible study in the circles and for worship in the monthly meetings of the groups. Together they devise ways of interpreting the nature of the God whom we worship and serve, and the task of the church to bring the judgment of God to bear "against evil wherever it is seen" and "at every point of suffering and wrong to reveal the grace of God in the possibilities for salvation, wholeness, and healing." They point out that

Christians are concerned on solid theological and Biblical grounds about such problems as segregation, housing, international tension, and civil liberties.

As the SEA secretary works with the missionary education secretary, they come to recognize that evangelism and Christian social concern are comparable and co-ordinate responsibilities of the church and of all Christians. In the study of the church's missionary outreach, the women become aware of the church's compassionate ministry to the victims of injustice in many parts of the world. The women gain a greater understanding of the causes of suffering in the world and of how Christian social action seeks to bring our social practices and institutions into harmony with the will of God as revealed in Christ.

The literature secretary in the women's association holds the key to much of the education that ought to be going on in the organization. It is important for this person to work closely with the SEA secretary and to have a clear understanding of the place and use of appropriate SEA literature in the women's program. The two secretaries will co-operate, for example, in promoting the wide use of SOCIAL PROGRESS. They will plan attractive bulletin boards and literature tables for association meetings.

The four secretaries in the program department should work in closest co-operation throughout the program year. They should meet frequently to plan and evaluate what goes on in association meetings and in the circles. Together they develop a total program strategy for the women of the church, and they ought to feel responsible for what the women can contribute to the work of the church as a whole.

The interest in social education and action initiated in women's groups should not stop there. The leaders responsible for this area of work should be alert to the possibilities for wide follow-up. In 1957, when the women of the churches used a study book on the United Nations, their interest in "the principal instrument for peace in our time" spread to church-wide meetings, family night programs, community night observances of UN Week, study of international problems in adult Bible classes. It also took some practical action form in the support of legislation for foreign economic aid and technical assistance, the care of refugees, and extending hospitality to foreign students in nearby

schools, universities, and colleges.

The women's study of "The Church and the Community" in 1952 resulted in the organization of many church committees of social education and action and in several significant surveys of community needs by officers and leaders of local churches. It also prompted women to become active in community organizations.

We believe that one of the most useful assignments in the church is that of the secretary for social education and action in the women's organization. It is our experience, and we say this thoughtfully, that in a great many churches the women are far ahead of the men in knowing what "social education and action" is all about and in understanding many of the social issues that should be our common Christian concern.

I hope what we have said here is at least a little useful. We suggest, of course, that you get in touch with the area secretaries for Christian education and with the SEA secretary in your presbyterial organization.

Sincerely yours,
The Department

The Committee

Dear Department:

In my first letter, a long time ago (or, rather, many words ago), I said that we planned to set up a committee on social education and action in the church at Anytown. The session made me chairman as a first step. For a while (quite a long while) it seemed that the session would be contented with a one-man committee—yours truly.

At our session meeting last night, the session decided that I really do need a committee, and that I should suggest a list of names.

So here are my questions. How many persons? What kind of persons? How should the committee be organized and do its work?

And this is important. In one of your letters you talked about social education in the regular activities—church school, youth work, and so on. The session has appointed a Christian education committee to take care of these programs. What should be the relationship of our new social education and action committee to the Christian education committee?

Thanks for the letter to Mrs. Layman. She is getting as interested in this thing as I am. Can she be on my committee?

Yours,

A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

We've been wondering when you would come up with the question about the local SEA committee. In fact, we have had a guessing contest (let's call it that) on the subject.

Even so, we give you a double gold star for going so thoroughly into questions about the purpose of social education and action, the ground on which we stand, the responsibilities of the minister and session, the issues and what the church can do about them, and the place of SEA in the church's educational program, before worrying about the committee. Your approach has been good.

First, let us suggest who should be on the committee.

The social education and action chairman will work with and through the persons in the various organizations of the church who carry responsibility for the social expression of our faith. There are three ways in which this can be done.

1. The chairman for social education and action may hold informal meetings of persons who are responsible for this emphasis in the ongoing program of the church. Among the workers who would participate

in these meetings are the social education and action secretary of the women's association, the chairman of the committee on civic responsibilities in the men's council, the citizenship representative of the youth fellowship, and persons carrying related duties in the young adult group and in other organizations of the church. It is often possible for these key persons to work effectively as an informal group. Meetings should be held at least every two months.

2. The chairman for social education and action may set up a formal committee composed of appropriate representatives from various organizations and age groups in the church. All adult and youth organizations would be represented—the official boards of the church, the women's association, the men's council, the youth fellowship, the young adult group, and other societies involved in the educational and service work of the church. The committee could be formed after a series of informal meetings of the key persons as described above. The minister of the church should be an ex officio member of the group, and in many churches would be the principal resource leader.

3. A formal committee may be set up composed of persons who are especially interested in Christian social action along with appropriate representatives from the principal organizations of the church. In addition to having key persons from the groups mentioned above, the committee would include a number of persons who have special interests or skills in the various fields of social concern—race relations, world order, alcoholism, citizenship, community affairs, economic life. For example, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous could be asked to serve on this committee, or a case worker in a family service agency, or a social studies teacher in the high school, or a leader in the League of Women Voters. The minister would be expected to take part in the deliberations of the committee.

4. The session may assign to the board of deacons responsibility for social education and action. This plan commends itself to some churches, but it runs the risk of isolating social education and action from the church's educational program. The traditional function of the deacons is to provide assistance for the needy. In some churches the deacons have become interested in the causes of human need and in doing something to correct conditions that contribute to poverty and insecurity. In such cases they may well be asked to take the lead in social education and action. The deacons should never be asked to carry this responsibility simply to give them something to do. The assignment should be made only when the board of deacons includes per-

sons who are genuinely interested in Christian social relations.

In the second place, let us say something about the job of the committee.

The over-all purpose of the social education and action committee is to stimulate and co-ordinate the development of social concern in all phases of the church's ongoing program, and to plan church-wide activities in which the social relevance of our faith is expressed. In more particular terms, the duties may be stated as follows:

1. To provide a variety of program resources and helps for all groups in the church. For example, the committee may build a working library of books and pamphlets on current problems to supplement teaching materials in the curriculum, may preview and recommend visual aids, may collect data about community issues, may suggest discussion leaders and speakers.
2. To provide stimulus and guidance for persons carrying social education and action responsibilities in the various organizations of the church.
3. To study local, state, and national legislation of concern to the church and recommend appropriate action by persons and groups.
4. To plan and promote church-wide study programs, church night forums, and meetings dealing with social issues.
5. To promote special observances for such occasions as Race Relations Sunday, Brotherhood Month, United Nations Day, Church and Economic

Life Week, Human Rights Day, Labor Sunday, World Order Day.

6. To interpret the social pronouncements of the General Assembly to the church, particularly to the officers of the church.

7. To initiate and sponsor specialized training events such as conferences and seminars, dealing with particular areas of Christian concern.

8. To work with the minister, the session, and the Christian education leaders in developing church-wide social goals and strategies.

9. To encourage the use of and to develop plans in connection with annual emphases in social education and action recommended by the denomination.

In the third place, we would like to say that your new social education and action committee should be most strongly related to the Christian education committee. That they should not be tied together in some effective way is unthinkable.

In your case, as your letter has described it, the session has set up the social education and action committee with one of its members, meaning you, as chairman. We assume that the Christian education committee also has been "appointed" by the session. It is indicated that you, as SEA chairman, should be a member of the Christian education committee. In social *education*, then, you and your team would work with and through the Christian education committee. Remember what we have said several (?) letters ago about

the distinction between social education and social action, and about social education being a "dimension" of Christian education.

Another plan would be to have the Christian education committee appoint a social education consultant who would be a member of your committee. This idea appeals to us. We would like to see it tried out somewhere.

Still another commendable idea is to have the SEA committee set up as a *subgroup* of the Christian education committee. This is the plan recommended in *Christian Education in Our Church*, the widely used local church manual. This arrangement makes certain that Christian education, in all its aspects, includes the "dimension" of social education. We should remember, however, that "corporate" social action is the prerogative of the session. In matters of action (when we are concerned primarily with what the church should *say* or *do* with reference to a given issue or incident or need) the SEA committee should always have "direct access" to the session and should function, in effect, as the session's "social action" resource group.

We have heard the suggestion that there should be actually two committees—a *social action* committee in the session and a *social education* committee (perhaps a one-man operation) in the Christian education arm of the church. This would seem to be an unnecessary, even disastrous, separation of *education* and *action*.

We hope this helps. All power to you and to the new committee.

Yours faithfully,
The Department

Resources

Dear Department:

We are on our way. The committee had its first meeting last night. A couple of the other session members came as observers and ex officio members. Really, they are so interested they couldn't stay away. Your letters did a lot of good, permanent good, in our session meetings.

We plan to meet every two weeks for the first couple of months or more. This will be our "orientation" period. After that we will break out into action all over the place. Anytown is going to know that we exist.

But I shouldn't sound too facetious. The group is serious in wanting to do God's will, or rather to lead the church in "responding to God's action" in our community.

Just one thing more: Can you send us a list of pamphlets and books for our work?

Forever grateful,
A. Layman

Dear Mr. Layman:

Here are some resources you may like to have and use.

We would mention first some general things put out by our Department—

* *Presbyterians and Public Affairs*. A descriptive folder about social education and action. Free in limited quantities.

You Can't Be Human Alone, by Margaret Kuhn. A 55-page handbook on group procedures for local church leaders. 40 cents plus postage. National Council of Churches, 120 E. 23d Street, New York 10, N. Y.

* *The Church and the Community*. We have already referred to this study guide on community relations. Instructor's Manual, 69 pages, \$1.00. Discussion Guide, 68 pages, 50 cents.

Reference has been made already to a basic book—†*Christian Social Ethics*, by Albert T. Rasmussen. This is a 306-page and index study of what Christian response should be toward the powerful social forces and economic pressures that affect all of us. It describes a strategy for churches in extending Christian influence. \$4.00.

Another book of fundamental importance is †*Christ and Culture*, by H. Richard Niebuhr. This is a readable and understandable discussion of the degree to which "the world" and "the Kingdom" should co-exist. 259 pages. Cloth, \$3.50; paper, \$1.25.

There are many very important books dealing with specific social issues. Let us mention just a few of them.

Houses and People, by Margaret Kuhn. This is a study and action guide of 39 pages for churches concerned about neighborhood improvement and the big problems of housing and urban renewal. 30 cents. NCC.

* *The Kingdom Beyond Caste*, by Liston Pope. This 170-page book sets the race problem in perspective by tracing the history of prejudice and its underlying causes, presenting scientific and religious data, and examining strategies for better race relations. Cloth, \$3.00; paper, \$1.25.

* *How to Help an Alcoholic*, by Clifford Earle. This is a 96-page handbook for people who have to deal with a difficult problem of alcoholism. It points out resources for help, describes available treatments, and has many practical suggestions for families and friends of alcoholics. \$1.50.

In the category of books on special issues, we should mention the "Ethics and Economics" series published by a study committee of the National Council of Churches. This list of a dozen or more titles includes the following:

* *American Income and Its Use*, by Elizabeth E. Hoyt, Margaret G. Reid, Joseph L. McConnell, Janet M. Hooks, and Walter G. Muelder. 362 pages. \$4.00.

* *Goals of Economic Life*, edited by Dudley Ward. 470 pages. \$4.00.

* *Social Responsibilities of the Business Man*, by Howard R. Bowen. 276 pages. \$3.50.

Our department has published a series of colorful pocket-size, 16-page pamphlets on a number of social questions. 25 copies, 75 cents; 100 copies, 2.50:

Fifty Million Americans Can Be Wrong (about gambling)

Vegetables and People (about race relations)

Ethyl Is Not a Lady (about alcohol)

Putting Ethyl in Her Place (also about alcohol)

We want to call your attention also to a number of important "back issues" of SOCIAL PROGRESS, the magazine which the Department publishes, having to do with specific issues and programs in the field of social education and action, 15 cents each:

"Changing America." A study of some social changes taking place in American life and their bearing upon persons and institutions, prepared by staff of Division of Christian Life and Work of the National Council of Churches. (April, 1957.)

"The Current Crisis in Human Rights" includes important articles on

"Power and Desegregation" and "Covenants of Open Occupancy." (March, 1957.)

* "Desegregation—Facing the Situation Where You Are." How to work toward desegregation in your community, whether the local attitude is favorable or otherwise. (September, 1957.)

* "The Problems of Alcohol." This deals with General Assembly pronouncements on alcohol and what can be done about them. (November, 1957.)

* "The Welfare of the Nations." This issue deals with foreign economic assistance and Christian responsibility. (January, 1958.)

* "The Areas of Rapid Change—Christian Responsibility Toward Asia, Africa, and Latin America." A guide for churches in participating in the World Council of Churches' study of "the common Christian responsibility toward areas of rapid social change." (February, 1958.)

We have greatly enjoyed our conversation with you. We have dropped a line to the chairman for social education and action in your presbytery, also to the Christian Education field director of your synod. You will undoubtedly be hearing from them.

In the meantime, if you have any questions—even leading ones—we will shake our pen and start writing.

Let us hear from you anyway.

Sincerely,
The Department

* Order from your nearest Presbyterian Distribution Service: 156 Fifth Avenue, New York 10, N.Y.; 416 S. Franklin Street, Chicago 7, Ill.; 234 McAllister Street, San Francisco 2, Calif.

† Order from your nearest Westminster Book Store: Witherspoon Building, Philadelphia 7, Pa.; 220 West Monroe Street, Chicago 6, Ill.; Room 201, 1501 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles 17, Calif.

A Social Progress Reprint

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Board of Christian Education
The United Presbyterian Church U.S.A.
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